Split Second Worksheet

1. Describe the *stasis* in the play: where, when, who, what, etc. in a paragraph.

The play takes place in Manhattan, New York in 1981. The play revolves around Val Johnson, a black police officer who shoots and kills a white male, Willis, who yells racial slurs at him. His wife, Alea Johnson, and Rusty Johnson are also prominent characters who share differing opinions on how the situation should be handled.

2. What is the *intrusion*?

The intrusion is when Val shoots Willis after he is already handcuffed and unarmed due to him screaming racial slurs at Val. The remainder of the play is focused on Val determining whether or not he should tell the cops what he really did, or if he should lie and say he killed Willis because he attacked him.

3. What is the *unique factor*

The unique factor is that Val is black and Willis is white. Throughout the play, Val often questions if he would have shot Willis if he was black.

4. What is the *dramatic question* that should be answered by the end of the play?

Will Val tell the truth, or will he lie and say that he shot Willis in self defense?

5. Provide an illustration of the *two kinds of exposition* that the play has in it.

The first type of exposition is that everyone knows that Willis has a rep sheet and that he was caught trying to steal a car. The second kind of exposition is that only Val and the audience knows why and how Willis was actually killed.

6. Identify the most *theatrical moment* in the play and of what importance it seems to be.

I think the most theatrical moment is when Willis argues with his dad and claims that he was forced into being a police officer because he didn’t know anything else growing up. It is significant because I felt like Val was trying to place blame on his dad for shooting Willis. If Val had never become a police officer because of his dad, he never would have shot Willis.

7. List some of the *themes* of the play.

Racism, Guilt, Justice, Right and Wrong

8. What do the principal characters *want* and what are some *obstacles* that stand in the way of them getting what they want?

Val: Val really does not know what he wants. He tries to justify the murder and lie to everyone about what actually happens. He goes back and forth about telling the truth and he can’t really make up his mind about what he wants to do.

Alea: Alea wants Val to lie about what happened. She thinks he was under a lot of stress and tries to justify the murder. She wants to keep him out of jail and wants him to protect himself.

Rusty: Rusty wants Val to come clean about the murder. He knows that his son has broken the law and needs to be punished for it.

9. Describe some possible *images* in the play and how does the *title* help us understand the play.

The title is a reflection on how everything can change in a split second, like it did for Val. In just one second, he was able to pull the trigger and kill Willis, changing everything in his life. One image is of the gun. The gun fired so fast and it forever changed Val’s life. A gun gave Val complete control over the situation and gave him power over Willis’s life. Val also talked about how he was a great shot, however he had never killed anyone until Willis.

10. Briefly define the *family relationships* that are examined in the play.

Alea and Val are husband and wife. They seem to care about each other deeply because even after Val admits the full details about the shooting, she still wants to be with him and wants him to lie to protect himself. Val and Rusty are father and son. Rusty and Val often clash heads because Val can never seem to make Rusty proud. Rusty also disagrees with Alea and Val and he thinks that Val should turn himself in and tell the truth about what happened in the shooting.